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ABSTRACT

Despite the problems and issues that arise from the merger (such as racial prejudice, polarization of blacks and whites, frustration, isolation, busing, and the maintenance of discipline), the merger results in a better school system, a stronger faculty and adminstration, and more dedicated and better informed citizenry. Several important goals are established in the very beginning of the merger: that students are to be protected; the quality of education in the Princeton schools is not to be lowered because of the merger; the cost of educating the students following the merger is not to be too expensive; white flight is to be prevented; there will be no excessive transportation of students; and, staff and students are to be integrated to the greatest extent possible on a planned controlled basis. How these goals are met, and how they remain to be met is noted. Various reasons are given for the merger's success such as abundant financial resources, little outside interference, the existence of a busing program prior to the merger, and community support. The prime key to success is a Board of Education that is solidly committed to the principle of desegregation and eventual integration of the school system. (Author/AM)

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by ROBERT E. LUCAS, President
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## Feature Article

# LINCOLN HEIGHTS-PRINCETON MERGER—FIVE YEARS LATER

by Robert E. Lucas

It has been my distinct privilege to have served as superintendent of the Princeton city schools for 20 years, 1955-1975. The Princeton district came into existence in 1955 as the result of the consolidation of eight districts put together by the Hamilton County Board of Education against the wishes of many citizens of the community. Court action was instituted to prevent the consolidation. After two years of litigation, the Ohio Supreme Court mandated that the district remain together.

There is no city by the name of Princeton, only a telephone exchange and a road. The original district was composed of what are now two cities (Sharonville and Springdale) and three villages (Evendale, Glendale, and Woodlawn) located in three counties and four townships. The district encompasses about 35 square miles and has a population of approximately 40,000. The rich industrial Millcreek Valley cuts across the area. The people of the district represent a cross section of all economic, social, racial, and religious backgrounds. The school population in 1955 was about 2,000 and had increased by 1970 to almost 9,000. Approximately 12 percent of this original population was black.

### THE LINCOLN HGTS.-PRINCETON MERGER

In February of 1970, the Ohio Department of Education, after making several inspections of the Lincoln Heights schools, revoked their charter and ordered the schools closed as of July of that year. After a series of meetings with representatives of Lincoln Heights, Princeton, Lockland, and Wyoming, the State Board ordered Lincoln Heights to merge with Princeton. At that time, Lincoln Heights was the nation's largest all-black city with a school population of approximately 1850 students. It was a city without an industrial tax base, approximately 40 percent of the citizens were on welfare, and it had one of the highest crime rates of any city in the State of Ohio.

Two weeks following the transfer, approximately 175 black students and 40 parents staged a sit-in at Princeton High School. Several demands were made of Princeton school officials and some concern was expressed about the merger. Following the news coverage of the sit-in, the immediate reaction many citizens of the Princeton district felt was one of shock, fear, and frantic striving to know what had happened to their schools. The Princeton Board of Education and administrative staff and the Lincoln Heights board and staff met the issues head-on with positive in-depth action.

The Lincoln Heights board and superintendent committed themselves to every possible means of bringing about a smooth transfer. The Princeton Board of Education passed a resolution which stated in part that "we accept the challenge of this responsibility, and we urge that the Lincoln Heights School District be brought into full membership in the Princeton School District, and the Princeton superintendent and his staff be directed to use all of their many talents to provide the children of the enlarged school district the same high academic opportunities that the Princeton children have enjoyed since the inception of the district."

As the superintendent of the Princeton Schools, the man in the middle, I had the difficult task of carrying out the board's mandate, for it was necessary to deal with some of the most sensitive and critical issues in America at a time when there was the greatest unrest in all parts of the country. There was

Dr. Lucas, former superintendent, Princeton City School District, is president of Wilmington College, Wilmington, Ohio. He is also president of the Ohio Congress of Parents and Teachers.

no direct or easy answer to any of the problems faced by the superintendent and his staff. The following were some of the major problems and issues:

Racial prejudice and downright hatred in some cases.

Many of the people, especially the adults, of both races had developed longstanding dislike and distrust for each other.

Many longtime friends of the superintendent were lost because he tried every way to be fair to both black and white people.

Fear was a problem. Both races seemed to be afraid of the other, and this led to the spread of rumors. Small incidents became major confrontations and media coverage, in some cases, helped exaggerate fears and rumors.

Polarization of black and white groups was evident everywhere. Even some church groups joined in and encouraged the polarization.

There was great frustration, especially on the part of the poor and the black. They had had many promises by politicians, governmental officials and others, and it didn't take the superintendent long to realize that "you do not promise it if you can't produce it."

Isolation was another problem — how to deal with both black and white isolation. There was also economic isolation. Having a school district made up of all-white cities and an all-black city made the school the only place where children came together.

Busing was a problem. What do you do about neighborhood schools, and how can one integrate a school system of 35 square miles without spending large sums of money in transporting children from one community to another?

Discipline was a problem. How does one maintain order in an integrated school, especially when all of the high school students are brought together in a building that was constructed for 1800 students and suddenly is housing nearly 3000?

The question of how to educate students of so many ability levels was a tremendous problem for teachers and administrators and a great concern of many parents.

Of course there was the question of how to develop or employ a staff of teachers, administrators, and operational employees capable of handling their responsibilities in a new and different setting. People were strangers to each other, and how could one get them to work together?

## STEPS TAKEN TO ASSURE ORDERLY TRANSFER

Dozens of steps were taken immediately to attack all of these and many other problems. First, leaders of both Princeton and Lincoln Heights worked together to develop a plan that safeguarded children and still maintained the highest quality education. An Advisory Committee to the Superintendent was established whose responsibility it was to hammer out details for the merger. The mass media were given a full understanding of the facts. Fact sheets were sent home to every family in the district. Open meetings were held in all the communities of the Princeton and Lincoln Heights districts. Personal meetings with all staff members were held and every aspect of the merger discussed. Princeton PTA's and the Lincoln Heights PTA began to work together. Students were involved in all phases of the plan. A buddy system was established. There was a summer school day camp for junior high school students, and a week-long camp for fifth graders. Summer school programs were established. Coaches and directors of student activities met with prospective students. Student councils met and established cooperative activities. Cheerleaders, teams, and school

newspaper staffs were brought together. Open meetings were held in the communities, such as kaffee-klatches and meetings with city and village officials. There were industrial advisory committees, as well as community school councils. A hotline telephone answered questions and stopped rumors. A speakers' bureau was established. The ministers of all the churches were brought together. Academic and arts festivals were provided. In-service workshops for all staff members gave special emphasis to learning how to teach basic reading, mathematics, and communications skills. A black studies program was instituted immediately. Counselors and many more paraprofessionals were added. The staffs of all schools were desegregated. Black administrators were placed in key positions — heads of buildings and in the central office. Massive revisions of curricular and extra-curricular programs were developed as quickly as possible. Human relations specialists were employed, and dozens of outside consultants and specialists were brought in to help prepare the way.

One of the most difficult tasks was that of maintaining discipline. The key to order in the school is being fair to all concerned, providing lots of positive things for all students to do, and establishing a code of conduct that spells out in detail what will take place in the event of a violation of the code. Parents and students were involved in establishing the code; penalties were established; and all were informed what penalties would be applied for such areas as fighting, violence of any kind, vandalism, stealing, profanity, and dozens of others. Of course, providing a code of conduct did not prevent the problems. It required a great deal of intestinal fortitude and a thorough commitment to do exactly what the code said; but, from the standpoint of the superintendent, the code was a life saver, for it provided him with the guidelines for holding his staff and students accountable. Even though numerous infractions were tested in the courts, due process was given and all court battles were won.

In the midst of all of this, 60 of the 72 bus drivers in the district went on strike and the board of education invoked the Ferguson Act. Every attempt was made to close the schools, yet the schools were kept open, no violence was committed, and within two months' time, new drivers were employed and trained and the transportation system was back in full operation again.

## MERGER BRINGS STRONGER SCHOOL DISTRICT

In looking back at all of the aspects of the merger and all of the things that took place, I think that the first two or three years were the most trying of my entire life. At the same time, they were the most satisfying, for out of it came a far stronger and better Princeton school system, a stronger faculty and administration, and a more dedicated and better informed citizenry.

There was very little "white flight." In fact, a few families who moved away from Princeton in 1971 moved back into the district by 1973. It was most satisfying to see religious groups, municipal officials, parent-teacher groups, and industrial and business leaders rally around the school system, vote tax issues, give support to school programs, and take great pride in seeing education and living conditions improve for the students of the entire area. There was a feeling of oneness and commitment that seemed to continue to grow. In fact, a number of parents, especially PTA leaders, created the slogan "PIP" (Pride in Princeton). They purchased banners and posters with "PIP" on them and posted them throughout the district. This became the theme and a moving spirit back of all Princeton activities. It is hoped that this spirit will continue for many years to come.

## GOALS ACHIEVED AND YET TO BE ACHIEVED

Several important goals were established in the very beginning of the merger. The following is a brief listing of the goals and how they have been met:

*Students were to be protected.*

We did not put up with violence or disruption of the educational process. By strict enforcement of the code of conduct, by inservice training of faculty and staff so they could discipline across racial lines, by careful vigilance and impartial handling of all cases, making sure that due process was given to students, staff, and parents, we had no violence nor disruptions of the educational program. A few students were expelled, and staff members were dealt with when necessary. Certainly everyone was not pleased, and we made no attempt to keep everyone happy. Good schools are not always happy places. For education to be of top quality requires hard work and sometimes it is a nasty business. To provide a top quality education, teachers must confront students and demand respect and hard work. Administrators must demand that teachers work and fulfill their assignments or get out. Communities must demand that the board of education and superintendent do their jobs or remove them from office. This the Princeton community did because the citizens wanted the best for their children and were willing to go after it.

*We were determined that the quality of education in the Princeton schools would not be lowered because of the merger.*

The following is a table comparing the Princeton District Stanford Achievement Test results for the elementary grades, three through eight, from 1969-70, the year before the merger, through last year, 1974-75:

| Year | Months Above (+) or Below (−) National Average |
|---|---|
| **Third Grade** | |
| 69-70 | +5 |
| 70-71 | +1 |
| 71-72 | +3 |
| 72-73 | +3 |
| 73-74 | +9 |
| 74-75 | +9 |
| **Fourth Grade** | |
| 69-70 | +5 |
| 70-71 | +2 |
| 71-72 | ±0 |
| 72-73 | +3 |
| 73-74 | +6 |
| 74-75 | +8 |
| **Fifth Grade** | |
| 69-70 | +6 |
| 70-71 | −2 |
| 71-72 | ±0 |
| 72-73 | +4 |
| 73-74 | +8 |
| 74-75 | +9 |
| **Sixth Grade** | |
| 69-70 | +6 |
| 70-71 | ±0 |
| 71-72 | −3 |
| 72-73 | +5 |
| 73-74 | +6 |
| 74-75 | +8 |
| **Seventh Grade** | |
| 69-70 | +7 |
| 70-71 | ±0 |
| 71-72 | −1 |
| 72-73 | +4 |
| 73-74 | +7 |
| 74-75 | +2 |
| **Eighth Grade** | |
| 69-70 | +6 |
| 70-71 | −1 |
| 71-72 | −5 |
| 72-73 | +4 |
| 73-74 | +3 |
| 74-75 | +4 |

The above table speaks for itself. Generally speaking, the academic achievement of the Princeton students was higher five years after the merger than it was before the merger. There are many reasons for this. Teachers were given a reasonable class load, special reading and mathematics laboratories were established, tutorial programs were set up, learning centers were established in all elementary buildings, new staffing patterns were developed including much team teaching, teachers were expected to hold numerous parent-teacher conferences, programs such as "Parents as Partners" were established, preschool and kindergarten programs were strengthened, and a tremendous inservice program was conducted for everyone. The high school program showed the same pattern as the elementary. Course offerings were expanded in all areas, and Princeton now offers more than 265 courses. Students choose their teachers as well as their courses. There is greater student involvement. College Board scores have generally held their own at a time when across the nation board scores are generally lower. At the beginning of the merger, approximately 40 to 45 percent of the graduating seniors were going on to advanced educational programs. In 1975, approximately 60 percent of the graduating seniors are going on to further education programs. Besides all of the academic programs, the following is a list of extra-curricular clubs and activities:

| | |
|---|---|
| Student Council | Princeton Inter-racial Club |
| Creative Writing Club | Welding Club |
| Drill Team | *Afro-American Culture Club |
| Ecology Club | *Gospel Chorus |
| International Club | *Human Equal Rights Council |
| Russian Club | Youth for Christ |
| Latin Club | *Wrestlerettes |
| French Club | Camera Club |
| Spanish Club | Chess Club |
| German Club | Ping Pong Club |
| Junior Council on World Affairs | *Library Club |
| Pep Club | Journalism Clubs (3) |
| Michaelangelo Society | Tri-Hi-Y |

* Not available in 1969-70

Princeton has gained a tremendous record of accomplishment in the State in athletics, music, art, debate, forensics, and dramatics. In other words, no matter what talent one might have, there is a program at Princeton to help him develop that talent.

*It was our goal that the cost of educating the students following the merger would not be too expensive.*

It is true, however, that it takes more money to educate students in an integrated school, because of the greater variety of programs and services needed. There were those who said the tax value behind each student would be drastically reduced as a result of the merger. In 1970, the tax value behind each student was $33,500. In 1975, the value behind each student in the Princeton district is $48,000. The tax rate has gone up from 29.80 mills in 1969 to 35.27 in 1975. This increase was necessary not because of the merger but because of the inflationary costs of operating a school.

*We would try to prevent "white flight."*

A few white families left the district, but others moved in to take their place, so that the ratio has continued to be 30 to 31 percent black from 1970 to 1975.

*There would be no excessive transportation of students.*

Busing is a very emotional issue. We tried to avoid as much cross-district transportation as possible. It was our plan to take students to specific educational centers such as one large comprehensive high school in the

district instead of two. One large junior high school was provided for students of junior high age and an intermediate school was built to offer opportunity for students of fourth, fifth and sixth grade level to attend an integrated school. If they chose this school, transportation was provided from throughout the district. Transportation was also used to take elementary students in integrated groups to the Princeton nature center, to combined music, art, and athletic activities, and other educational field trips. Transportation is not too expensive if it provides a very real enriched educational program for students. It would be academically expensive not to provide it.

*Staff and students would be integrated to the greatest extent possible on a planned and controlled basis.*

The percentage of black staff in 1969-70 was 5.6. In 1975, it is 25.6 percent. There are black teachers in all schools and black administrators in approximately 30 percent of the administrative positions. From the standpoint of students, all grades, seven through 12, have been fully integrated. With the establishment of the Robert E. Lucas Intermediate School, which has a 50:50 black-white ratio, grades four, five and six were given the opportunity to choose an integrated school. Students throughout the district may select this school. Students in the primary schools have not been regularly transported out of their home neighborhoods. The United States Congress and the President are developing legislation that will no doubt establish guidelines for future directions in busing of students for integration. It is most difficult to take kindergarten-primary students out of their neighborhood schools, especially when the staffs are integrated and the pupil-teacher ratio is approximately 20:1, and when there are special tutors, special teachers in art, music, and physical education, and numerous district-wide activities that bring primary children into other integrated activities. Both black and white parents object strenuously to moving the small children, and there is a real question of whether the emotional strain of the opposition of parents makes the busing of primary children an educational asset or liability. Only time and further research will decide this.

**Why was Princeton relatively free of serious trouble in desegregation efforts?**

There was a well-organized plan, openly discussed and basically understood by most people in the district. The plan was organized by the people, for the people, and involved students, faculty, parents, and other community leaders.

The Princeton merger went well because Princeton had a strong, committed board of education and Lincoln Heights had the same kind of board. They had no aim but to provide the best for all children and youth of the community. Princeton already had an outstanding school system. That school system needed to change, and the majority of the faculty, students, and parents were willing to change.

There were excellent financial resources available in the Princeton district, and the board and superintendent did not hesitate to seek additional funding resources. We not only went after federal funds, but asked the State Board to transfer additional tax base from the Lockland School District, and put levies on the ballot when they were needed so that adequate funds were available to do the job that needed to be done.

The Princeton-Lincoln Heights merger was successful also because the chief school administrator had had a long record of trying to communicate with the community, was well-known, and had worked for strong discipline and high quality education for many years.

It was also important that there was little outside interference, unlike the Boston and Louisville mergers. There were no radical, rabble-rousing groups in the community, and none were brought in to help emotionalize issues or create violent situations. The media in the Cincinnati area were generally fair and did not create sensational stories.

The Princeton-Lincoln Heights merger was successful also because there had already been an extensive busing program in the district. It was not new to the white population of Princeton to have their children ride buses from 15 to 30 minutes every morning and evening. Therefore, this issue did not become the big emotional block that it is in most major cities. Also, at Princeton, the primary children were not bused out of their home neighborhoods.

Another reason for success was that there were a broad educational program and an extensive activity program for students of all interests and all backgrounds; for example, 265 academic courses in high school, 12 interscholastic sports activities for boys, eight for girls; many bands, orchestras, and vocal groups of all kinds; musicals; drill teams; a good student newspaper; speech; debate; clubs of all kinds. Students who have plenty of stimulation academically and interesting activities seldom have time to get into trouble.

Finally, the Princeton-Lincoln Heights merger was successful because it was the reasonable and right thing to do. Any reasonable individual could not possibly say that it was good for Lincoln Heights to try to make it on its own with only about $8,000 in taxable property behind each child while next door was the wealthy Princeton school district with all kinds of industrial tax base and an outstanding school system with books, materials, and human resources. It simply didn't make sense to keep them apart. Hundreds of people gave lots of time and much hard work. Some lost friendships, but they knew the time had come when it was essential for these two schools to be merged for the welfare of everybody in the Millcreek Valley.

## ADVICE TO DISTRICTS FACING POSSIBLE DESEGREGATION

It is most difficult to give advice that will be of much value to any district facing the desegregation problem. However, some points might be made. The prime key to success is a board of education that is solidly committed to the principle of desegregating and eventually integrating the school system and that will stay together to provide the leadership and financial resources to do the job. This will require seeking tax issues and state and federal support.

The second most important key is that the board employ a superintendent who is just as committed as board members are to high quality integrated education, turn the job of managing the schools over to that person, then give the necessary support to deal with staff, community, students, and all the forces of public relations and public information.

Most school districts fail because too many people are giving too many kinds of direction, boards become divided, the administration isn't clear on what it intends to do, and no one is sure what is expected. In the Princeton school district, a set of guiding principles was developed and followed. It would be my recommendation that any superintendent and board facing similar problems establish some basic beliefs and follow them.

## ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL BIRACIAL MERGER

Here are the principles that we used, and I would highly recommend them to any school system:

We strongly believe that integration and quality education go hand in hand. Children learn much from books and teachers, but they also learn some very important things by living side by side with other

children who come from different social, economic, racial and religious backgrounds. We expect every individual in the Princeton schools to be a winner. In other words, we developed a desire for excellence. Teachers and administrators were expected to be the best and were held accountable. Students were expected to excel. No student was expected to be a loser, and this quality was drilled into the minds of everyone. We expected to have first class people and a first class school system. Education should not vary because of race, income or religion. We did not believe in changing the educational program because some people are different from others. We never lowered standards. We expected students, teachers, and operational staff to maintain top standards in everything they did. It was our goal to bring students to standards, not standards to students. In other words, we developed a school system that nurtured giftedness. The board of education, administration, staff, and students of a school system must have confidence in themselves. This is especially true of the leadership of the school. We had confidence that we could do the job of integrating the two-school systems. That confidence went a long way when the going was rough. The attitude of the teacher is the most important factor in a child's education. Research has shown this to be true. We expect all teachers to expect all children to learn and to treat them as effective learners. As the superintendent and the man in the middle, my expectancy for myself was that I stay calm and confident, be fair to all concerned, not allow myself to be intimidated to do anything that wasn't right for the students, and pray for divine guidance. It is is my firm belief that God does not give one a heavier load than he can carry, provided he is willing to listen, seek the help of those around him, and use the spiritual resources that are available to him. As a result of these principles and the hard work of thousands of people, the Princeton schools have progressed and have become one of the finest school systems in the nation. I was extremely proud to be superintendent and to see over and over again that we had in the school system the most intelligent, the most considerate, and the most capable young people the world has ever known. It was truly an honor and a privilege to have had the opportunity to work with them.